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SIPDIS

STATE ALSO FOR PRM

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [UNHRC](#) [ELAB](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: GENEVA-BASED HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES FIND IT TOUGH TO
STRENGTHEN INFLUENCE ON ZIMBABWE

REF: A. GENEVA 320

[B](#). USUN 419
[C](#). GENEVA 357

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark Storella. Reasons: 1.4 (B/D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Zimbabwe's Mission in Geneva has taken a hard line on Geneva-based UN bodies' efforts to address the situation in the country. In a meeting with officials of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Zimbabwe's ambassador here had harsh words for High Commissioner Arbour and chafed at a May 13 press release by the Office of the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator about the humanitarian situation in his country, an OHCHR official told us. The Mission also has been uncooperative toward UN Special Rapporteurs seeking to investigate developments in Zimbabwe. A low-level OHCHR official played a modest but constructive role over several weeks that he spent in Zimbabwe recently, we were told, and hopes to return there shortly. There is little prospect for Arbour to send a Special Envoy or fact-finding mission for the moment. Similarly, a special session on Zimbabwe in the Human Rights Council is unlikely for now, and some delegations are exploring how best to use the Council's upcoming regular session to address the issue. In the International Labor Organization, Zimbabwe remains a subject of possible discussion in the June ILO conference. Overall, there is a sense of frustration among Geneva-based human rights officials about addressing Zimbabwe's human rights situation.
END SUMMARY.

A TOUGH STANCE FROM ZIMBABWE'S GENEVA MISSION

[1](#)2. (C) Scott Campbell, head of the OHCHR's Africa Unit, told us May 15 that Zimbabwe's Mission here was taking a hard line on efforts to address the human rights situation in the country. Campbell and a low-level OHCHR official just back from several weeks in Harare got a cool reception when they met with Zimbabwe's ambassador here. The ambassador harshly criticized High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour for being a tool of developed countries and for seeking to interfere in Zimbabwe's internal situation.

[1](#)3. (C) Zimbabwe's ambassador also expressed dissatisfaction with a May 13 press release by the Office of the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator in Zimbabwe concerning the

humanitarian situation in the country. That press release underscored increasing requests for humanitarian assistance by people affected by violence, noted that UN humanitarian agencies and their NGO partners have had to scale back their programs due to limited access to such people, and stressed that the Government of Zimbabwe has primary responsibility to provide protection and "a legal duty to act in the event of human rights abuses and violations."

14. (C) In addition, Zimbabwe's Geneva Mission also has been uncooperative toward UN Special Rapporteurs who have sought to investigate various aspects of the situation in the country, Campbell reported. He speculated that this may have resulted at least in part as a reaction to an April 29 statement by six SRs expressing grave concern with the unfolding situation there (reftel).

A PRODUCTIVE OHCHR PRESENCE ON THE GROUND

15. (C) Campbell expressed hope that the low-level OHCHR official would return to Zimbabwe within a few weeks. The official, working with the UN country team, had had good access to a range of high-level officials in Zimbabwe, including several ministers. He also had succeeded in meeting with a number of NGOs and to make hospital and prison visits to opponents of the regime. While the OHCHR official had kept a relatively low profile, he had had a positive albeit modest impact, in the High Commissioner's judgment, we were told.

WEAK PROSPECTS FOR SPECIAL ENVOY

16. (C) Beyond that, however, OHCHR is frustrated with its limited possibilities of having an impact. Campbell said that Arbour was unlikely to propose a special envoy or fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe on her own, since Harare would certainly reject it. Such proposals would likely succeed only if proposed by an African entity, such as the SADC, and no such entity was showing much appetite for doing so.

LOOKING FOR A ROLE FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

17. (C) Meanwhile, earlier discussion among West European delegations on whether to hold a Human Rights Council special session on Zimbabwe has subsided. Slovenia's Political Counselor told us that EU delegations believed that even gaining the necessary 16 signatures to hold a special session was unlikely, and even were it to occur, it would likely send the wrong message, given the views of many in the African Group and its allies. The EU was deliberating about how to use the June regular session of the Council most effectively to highlight the situation.

ILO ACTIVITY

18. (SBU) As noted ref a, Zimbabwe remains a possible subject for discussion when the Committee on the Application of Standards meets during the ILO conference in June. Zimbabwe has now been placed on the preliminary list of cases to be discussed in respect to the Freedom of Association Convention Number 87, although no final decision has been made. Meanwhile, the ILO intervened with a letter to the Government of Zimbabwe regarding recent arrests and detentions of officials of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

COMMENT

19. (C) We detect the same common frustration in Geneva about how best to address Zimbabwe's human rights situation as USUN reported with regard to New York (ref b). Even while the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees is making plans

in coordination with Zimbabwe's neighbors (ref c), the question of influencing the human rights situation in-country is proving more intractable, although OHCHR has made some progress on the ground and the High Commissioner and others have made useful statements on the issue.

TICHENOR